DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 735 PS 024 210

TITLE Commissioner's Task Force on Parent Involvement in Head Start. Final Report.
INSTITUTION Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (DHHS), Washington, DC. Head Start Bureau.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 51p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Caregivers; Cooperation; Decision Making; Early Childhood Education; Evaluation; *Parent Participation; Parent Role; Questionnaires; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS *National Head Start Association; *Project Head Start; Task Force Approach

ABSTRACT

The National Parent Involvement Task Force was created in April 1985 by the Commissioner of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families of the Department of Health and Human Services to review parental involvement in Head Start. The final report's sections include: (1) statement of the chairman (Richard H. Johnson); (2) rationale for task force; (3) charge given task force and objectives; and (4) summary of task force activities. Sections of the report also outline recommendations for: (1) improving parent involvement; (2) improving parent participation in decision-making; (3) increasing parent participation in Head Start classrooms and activities; (4) developing parents' opportunities to participate; (5) increasing opportunities for parents to work with their children; and (6) strengthening parent participation in transition of children from Head Start to elementary school. Two appendices include the Parent Task Force Committee Questionnaire on Head Start Parent Involvement and a listing of Parent Involvement Task Force members. (BGC)

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ED 394 735

Final Report

Commissioner's Task Force on Parent Involvement in Head Start

PS 024210

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Final Report

Commissioner's Task Force on Parent Involvement in Head Start April 1987

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"I feel more secure within myself. I feel I am a better parent."

..... a Head Start parent

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Statement of the Chairman

The problem of poverty in this country continues to plague the lives of thousands of human beings trapped in this insidious web of circumstances. Poverty, left unconfronted, reportedly is responsible for having devastating effects on families with young children, and frequently is associated with high rates of infant mortality; mental retardation; illegitimate births, low birth weight infants; unemployment; family disintegration; personal deterioration; child abuse; school drop outs; alcoholism; chemical dependence; suicide, etc. Many, if not all of these problems, may have negative impacts on young children, and can prevent them from ever reaching their full potential during their life time.

Head Start, as a comprehensive family and child-centered program represents an approach aimed at trying to break the cycle of poverty through concurrent, coordinated intervention strategies which include a strong emphasis on parent involvement. Recognition of the importance of parents' roles in their children's education and overall development has existed for generations, yet it is only recently that this process has begun to receive the attention it deserves. In Head Start, parents, staff members and community residents all have a stake in improving the quality of a child's education, as well as the child's social, emotional and psychological development. However, it is an accepted fact that parents are the earliest and most influential teachers of their children. Since Head Start accepts this premise, local programs provide a diversity of opportunities and experiences for and with parents which aim at strengthening their roles as *learners*, as *decision-makers*, as *volunteers*, as *planners*, as *teachers*, as *advocates* for their children, and as the *principle influencers* of their children's education and development.

It is my hope that the findings and recommendations of this task force will serve as a catalyst to bring forth constructive strategies to further enhance the meaningful involvement of parents in Head Start programs. During the course of our deliberations the task force shared and reviewed numerous circumstances which graphically demonstrated some of the hindrances and obstacles that stand in the way of successful parent involvement. The majority of our time was spent identifying useful and positive approaches to increasing parent involvement in Head Start.

We who have served on the task force have broadened our awareness of the complex, multi-dimensional nature of parent involvement, remain even more committed to the need to increase the number of parents who become involved in the Head Start program with their children. Commissioner Dodie Livingston charged this task force with the responsibility of reviewing the full scope of the parent involvement component in Head Start, and of making suitable recommendations which could further strengthen this vital component. The report which follows cannot be viewed as the final answer, but will serve as the nucleus of a renaissance of thinking about how to bring about more meaningful parent involvement in Head Start nation-wide.

Richard H. Johnson
Chairman

April 1987

Rationale for Task Force and Charge Given

Rationale for Task Force and Charge Given

A number of factors contributed to the creation of the task force, and subsequently represented the underlying rationale for its existence. To begin with, out of a continuing recognition of the important role that parents play in their young children's lives, the Administration for Children, Youth and Families and the Head Start Bureau wanted to be sure that Head Start programs were doing everything possible through their service delivery approaches to support parents in strengthening their role as the principle influencers in their children's lives. Furthermore, as research evidence continued to reveal that young children's learning skills were enhanced when their parents were involved in their education, it became increasingly essential that Head Start programs focus even more attention on assisting parents to support their children during their transition from Head Start to the elementary schools. In addition to these factors, it was seen as vital that Head Start programs must continually provide the kinds of enriching opportunities and experiences for parents which can lead to their own personal, parental, leadership, and adult development. Monitoring data on Head Start programs over the past few years indicated that many parents were involved in at least some aspects of the programs, but there was a sense that most parents would benefit even more by becoming involved in all of the different aspects of program activities. Hence, since the parent involvement performance standards require a multi-faceted approach to involving parents in the program, ACYF was interested in how to enrich the variety of program approaches which enable parents to improve their skills as parents, as *volunteers* or *contributors*, as *decision-makers*, as *planners*, and as *prime or first educators of their children*. Finally, during FY 1986, 1987, the Head Start Bureau reviewed all policies and regulations affecting Head Start programs in an attempt to update and clarify them. This process included the parent involvement performance standards. The task force assisted the ACYF, Head Start Bureau in accomplishing their review. Thus, the overall rationale in all of these endeavors was to increase the number of parents who became involved in the Head Start program with their children.

The National Head Start Parent Involvement Task Force was created in April, 1985 by Dodie Livingston, Commissioner, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Office of Human Development Services, Department of Health and Human Services. Commissioner Livingston revealed her interest in wanting to see parent involvement increased in

Head Start programs nation-wide, and stated she was creating a national task force to examine the current status of parent involvement in local programs.

Commissioner Livingston named Richard H. Johnson, Chief of the Social Services and Parent Involvement Branch, Program Support Division of the Head Start Bureau, to be Chairman of the task force. William Acosta, OHDS Regional Administrator was named to represent the regional offices, and Sarah Greene, President of the National Head Start Association Board of Directors, was named to represent that organization. Because of the complexity of parent involvement in Head Start, and the work to be performed by the task force, the composition of the task force had to be broadly representative of the Head Start community. For this reason, representatives from the National Head Start Association's four Affiliate Associations were selected to serve on the task force by their respective presidents.

The task force was charged with reviewing the full scope of the parent involvement component in Head Start, with a view toward accomplishing the following objectives:

(1) Maximizing parent participation in the decision-making process in local programs;

(2) Increasing parent participation in Head Start classrooms and other activities;

(3) Increasing parents' opportunities to participate in activities which they have helped to develop;

(4) Insuring that parents are provided the opportunity to work with their children in cooperation with Head Start staff; and

(5) Furthering the ability of parents to sustain and build upon the Head Start experiences as their children move into Elementary School.

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Summary of Task Force Activities

Summary of Task Force Activities

The task force met seven times to conduct business during the period between July, 1985 and February, 1987. Using the knowledge and expertise of its members, the task force proceeded to solicit information; review official documents, reports, research and evaluation data, past and current literature pertaining to parent involvement; secure data from Head Start parents via surveys and informal interviews; meet with experts in the field, including other government officials within the national and regional Head Start offices; and solicit and review input from the Head Start community in general. This various information, coupled with the extensive knowledge and experience of each task force member, led to a number of analytical exercises, i.e., identifying and reviewing the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Head Start parent involvement components, the major supports for assuring successful parent involvement, and the major hindrances to implementing successful parent involvement. The task force focussed its attention on what were perceived to be the major overall needs and concerns related to parent involvement.

The first meeting of the task force was held in Crystal City, Virginia, July 1-3, 1985, at which time members were introduced and shared their personal experiences related to parent involvement in Head Start programs. Many official relevant documents pertaining to parent involvement were examined by the task force. A brainstorming exercise followed with each member listing problems associated with parent involvement, and possible solutions for resolving these problems. Another discussion identified the number of constraints or hindrances affecting the successful implementation of parent involvement in local programs as they related to the four major areas of parent participation which are:

(1) decision-making;
(2) classroom participation;
(3) parent initiated activities; and
(4) working with their children.

The task force agreed it would be helpful to develop a survey to solicit information from a nation-wide sample of parents relative to their knowledge and feelings about their participation in Head Start. It was further agreed that task force representatives from the National Head Start

Association would develop the survey during their October, 1985 Board meeting. Further, each task force member agreed to discuss the proceedings of this task force meeting with their Affiliate Association, and gather local and regional input for the second task force meeting scheduled for November, 1985.

The task force held its second meeting November 11-13, 1985, in Grand Junction, Colorado, preceding the National Head Start Parents' Association Second Annual Training Conference. At this meeting each task force member reported on the input they obtained from their local communities and their State and regional associations. The task force then analyzed and categorized issues, problems and proposed solutions relating to parent involvement, according to the five major objectives of the task force. The types of action needed to achieve these recommendations were organized under five areas which were:

(1) Policy;
(2) Guidance;
(3) Supervision/Management;
(4) Training; and
(5) Funding.

The five areas were then organized under each of the five major objectives of the task force. Fostering the process was a discussion of the Parent Manifesto; the need for guidance for Head Start parents serving as volunteers; new initiatives in parent involvement being developed by ACYF and OHDS, and the need for a sub-committee to review various materials, i.e., evaluation reports, resource documents, research findings which might be available in the national ACYF office. Further, the Parent Survey, as referred to previously in this report, was reviewed and revised, and then given to the NHSPA representatives on the task force to distribute to the parent attendees participating in the Second Annual Parent Training Conference in Grand Junction, Colorado for completion.

In concluding its second meeting, the task force then agreed that five issues needed more in-depth discussion, and placed them on the agenda for the next meeting. The issues were:

- Native American Indian Sovereign Nations and Parent Involvement;
- Assessment of Training Needs of Parents in Local Programs;
- Minimal Requirements for Parents;
- Impasse Policy; and
- Three Year Limitation of Members Serving on Policy Groups.

The third task force meeting was held in Atlanta, Georgia, January 3-5, 1986. The task force worked as a full body to review, redefine, and reach

consensus on all of the preliminary recommendations. Following this exercise, a first draft of the preliminary recommendations was completed.

Our fourth meeting was held following the NHSA's Board meeting in Orlando, Florida, February 9-11, 1986. At this meeting the task force reviewed the results of the Parent Survey which was completed by one-fourth of the five hundred parents participating in the National Head Start Parents' Association's Second Annual Training Conference, and agreed on a format for the final report to be submitted to Commissioner Dodie Livingston.

Task Force members divided into five teams, and developed the content for each section of the final report. Each section's draft was then reviewed and critiqued by all members of the task force prior to submitting the finished rough draft to the Chairman, Richard Johnson, for final processing and typing. On March 11, 1986, the finished report in final was submitted to the Commissioner, outlining an extensive list of general and specific recommendations. Commissioner Livingston has reported the task force findings and recommendations to a number of Head Start audiences, including the National Head Start Association's Annual Training Conference attendees in April, 1986 in Portland, Oregon. In addition, she concurred with the task force's proposal to continue its duties beyond February, 1986, and to assist in evaluating the implementation of the recommendations and follow-up activities associated with the recommendations.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES FROM FEBRUARY, 1986 TO JANUARY, 1987

During the extended period of deliberations, the task force focused its attention on the following activities:

- reviewing, evaluating and commenting on the Head Start Bureau's proposed action plan for implementing the recommendations;
- clarifying and strengthening some of the initial recommendations;
- reviewing and commenting on reports, proposed policy changes affecting Head Start, and other relevant data;
- attending and supporting the National Head Start Parents' Association's Third Annual Training Conference in Jackson, Mississippi during October, 1986;
- participating in the development of a training video-tape concerning joint decision-making in Head Start;

- identifying the major elements or content areas for the development of a handbook for Grantee/Delegate Agency Board members, parents and staff, which would facilitate their understanding of their roles in bringing about successful parent involvement under the decision-making performance standards;

- planning a task force panel presentation for the National Head Start Association's Training Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana in April, 1987; and

- developing additional new recommendations.

The first meeting of the extended period (the fifth overall meeting of the task force) took place in Washington, D.C., September 30-October 2, 1986 in the Hubert H. Humphrey Building, headquarters for the Department of Health and Human Services. The second meeting was held in Jackson, Mississippi just prior to the National Head Start Parents' Association Training Conference at the downtown Holiday Inn, November 19-21, 1986. The third and last meeting of the task force (its seventh overall) took place January 29-30, 1987 in ACYF's fifth floor conference room, Donohoe Building, Washington, D.C.

The culmination of the task force members' deliberations resulted in a total of thirty-seven different recommendations, all of which are aimed at responding to the five objectives outlined by Commissioner Livingston in her charge to the task force. The recommendations are categorized and presented in accordance with those objectives in the following sections of the report. Each recommendation is followed by a brief discussion.

Recommendations (21) For Improving All Areas of Parent Involvement

Recommendations (21) For Improving All Areas of Parent Involvement

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Interpret and enforce all policies and performance standards pertaining to parent involvement across all ACYF regional offices in a consistent manner.

Discussion

Task Force testimony reveals there are variances between regional offices in both interpreting and enforcing parent involvement policies and performance standards in local Head Start programs. These circumstances have led to occasional misinterpretations of these policies in the field, which in turn have led to local grantees carrying out improper procedures related to these policies and performance standards. Some of the misinterpretation and lack of enforcement of the parent involvement policies in some regional offices, at times has been construed as a lack of interest in or support for parent involvement in general in Head Start programs. Task force members agree that this disparity across regions must be eliminated if parent involvement is to be successful nation-wide, and if ACYF is to maintain its credibility in the field. In order to accomplish these objectives, the task force believes the National ACYF Head Start Bureau must recognize these disparities and hold the ten regional offices, the Indian Branch and the Migrant Branch accountable for the proper and uniform interpretation and enforcement of the parent involvement policies across the country in all Head Start grantees and delegate agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Develop a policy for Head Start grantees specifying minimal measureable requirements for involving parents in Head Start programs.

DISCUSSION

In addition to complying with the parent involvement performance standards, the task force believes firmly that Head Start grantees need to

be carrying out on a year to year basis, planned, sequential activities aimed at strengthening parent involvement which can be readily measureable by review teams or others visiting their programs. The consensus of the task force is that parent involvement in local Head Start programs is very difficult to measure, given the few available indicators that might be used on monitoring teams. As a result, determining compliance or non-compliance with the performance standards in this component becomes a subjective exercise. In an attempt to respond to this problem, the task force took time to list what they considered to be some grantee minimal requirements for assuring that parent involvement would take place in local Head Start programs, and would increase parent involvement. Those grantee minimal requirements are as follows:

- properly trained staff;
- comprehensive written plan for parent involvement;
- comprehensive parent interviews;
- provision of information about program to parents prior to enrollment.
- the expectation that parents are to participate in the program to be verbalized and reinforced by staff at the time of recruitment and enrollment;
- comprehensive orientation for parents and staff, using a portfolio as information annually for consistency;
- provision of training for parents who observe or volunteer in the classrooms or any other aspects of the program;
- implementation of a buddy system, teaming up veteran parents with more years' experience with the first year parents;
- an organized and duly constituted policy group with at least 50% parents:
- training annually of policy groups, center/classroom committees and grantee or delegate agency board members;
- ongoing training as necessary;
- opportunities for teaching staff to work with parents outside the classroom;
- posting of minutes of policy group meetings and reporting back to all parents;
- holding policy group meetings at least once monthly and more frequently as necessary;
- having ongoing component committees involving parents;
- providing more incentives and rewards for parent volunteer hours, e.g., gifts, appreciation banquets, luncheons, dinners, parent of the year awards or recognition, parents' names in newsletter, trips, etc.; and
- provision of training for parents on their children's transition to elementary school.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Develop a policy requiring parents to be involved in Head Start programs a minimum number of hours a month (without penalty to the enrolled child or parent).

Discussion

The task force feels strongly that some kind of minimal requirements for parents to take part in the program are essential if increased parent involvement in Head Start nation-wide is to become a reality. Many parents willingly volunteer their time in Head Start programs because they understand the value of the program for their children. Fewer parents volunteer because they see the value of the program for themselves as adults, and there are many parents who never volunteer their time because of various expressed reasons. However, because research evidence continues to reveal the positive impacts accrued to children by parents who do become involved in their children's education and development, the task force believes the time has come to require at least minimal parent involvement for all parents with children enrolled in the Head Start program. The minimal requirements for parents should be as follows:

1. All parents should be expected to participate in the Head Start program a designated number of hours a month, and have the option to choose which activities they wish to become involved with;

2. All parents should attend the initial program orientation as a prerequisite to officially enrolling their child in the program, and

3. All parents are required to actively participate in their children's health screenings and treatment/follow-up care by taking responsibility for their own children in these program activities.

This recommendation comes out of a realization that after twenty-two years of program service, parent involvement in Head Start has proven to be valuable for children, parents, families and communities. A requirement that parents become involved in some aspect of Head Start of their own choosing is not viewed as punative by the task force. Rather, it is viewed as necessary in order to preserve the integrity of the program, and to have the maximum impact on pre-school children and their parents.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Assure that all policies support and reinforce parent involvement in Head Start.

Discussion

Different task force members have become aware of some national office and regional office policy directions which may not support and reinforce parent involvement in Head Start. As a result, they have wanted to go on record as expressing their concern about any such policy directions, including any proposed new programs which may minimize or even exclude parent involvement from their process. Two examples of this problem were discussed by the task force. The first included a regional office that systematically reduced the amount of parent activity funds in a large number of Head Start grantees in that region, and the exclusion of parents from the review teams under the new CDA credentialling procedure. Both instances were viewed by the task force as sending negative messages to the Head Start community concerning parent involvement, and were seen as reversals of previous policy.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

ACYF, Head Start Bureau communications to the field pertaining to parent involvement should be thorough, clear and concise.

DISCUSSION

There has been a history of local Head Start programs misinterpreting the parent involvement performance standards, particularly *Appendix B., 70.2, The Parents.* In order to avoid confusion, and to assure Head Start grantees clearly understand parent involvement policies, the task force highly recommends that any communications to the field from our Federal offices pertaining to parent involvement be clearly and concisely stated.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Utilize local community input when establishing national parent involvement priorities and directions.

Discussion

The task force wishes to convey their support of the ACYF, Head Start Bureau's practice of obtaining local community input when involved in planning, developing and establishing national parent involvement priorities and directions.

The real message from this recommendation is that this practice needs to be consistent, and ACYF should continue to follow such a procedure.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Create a national clearinghouse to disseminate parent involvement information to Head Start programs.

Discussion

It was revealed by the task force members that many Head Start grantees and delegate agencies are unaware of the many relevant publications on parent involvement in existence that could help their respective programs. A national clearinghouse to collect and disseminate parent involvement resource information to local programs would be a very much appreciated service, and could contribute to strengthening local program parent involvement components. At present, grantees do receive limited copies of Head Start publications, but frequently the staff in most need of such documents seldom see them. In addition, the task force expressed awareness of publications outside of the ACYF Head Start Bureau network that focus on this component, and that need to be brought to the attention of Head Start programs nationwide.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Require all Head Start programs to maintain adequate parent activity funds consistent with DHHS policies, without unnecessary restrictions being imposed on their use.

Discussion

Every Head Start grantee, through their refunding application, and through the approval of their Policy Council, can earmark a percentage of their Federal grant funds for parent activities consistent with DHHS policies. The task force has learned that in many Head Start grantees and delegate agencies they do not request parent activity funds, or the amount requested is so minimal that very few parent initiated and sponsored activities can be planned and carried out. As specified earlier, another problem could be a regional office policy that imposes unnecessary restrictions on the use of these funds by parents in the program. In any event, there is a need for the national office to bring about consistency in the administration of these funds across all regions. These funds are to be maintained, used and administered by parent policy groups, and are accountable for an annual audit. It needs to be made clear that these parent activity funds are in addition to amounts specified in the Head Start budget for parent travel, training, participation in special organizations and policy meetings and for babysitting. The center committee is responsible

for establishing plans, priorities, activities and budget at the local center or classroom level, while the policy council or policy committee is responsible for such plans, priorities, activities and budget at the city-wide or county-wide and delegate agency level.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Develop a competency area in CDA reflecting staff competency in working with parents.

Discussion

The task force members expressed concern about some Head Start classroom staff who are well qualified for their responsibilities with children in the classroom but who are lacking in their ability to work with and relate to parents in a sensitive, supportive manner. Schools issuing degrees in early childhood do not routinely offer courses on parent involvement. Head Start is able to partially remedy this problem by building into their CDA credentialling program a competency area in working with parents, and by encouraging local grantees and delegate agencies to include this important requirement as a necessary qualification for applicants seeking teaching positions in Head Start programs.

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Require regional monitoring teams to be reflective of the local program's families' ethnic and cultural make-up.

Task force members expressed awareness of complaints by some local Head Start program staff and parents about monitoring teams made up entirely of individuals whose racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds were not reflective of those of the families served in the program. This kind of oversight could lead to credibility problems for ACYF if done on a continuing basis. National and regional offices need to be aware of this problem to assure that it does not occur on a repeated basis.

RECOMMENDATION 11:

Consider solutions to the transportation and accessibility problems that interfere with succcessful parent participation in local programs.

Discussion

Although this problem is seen as more serious in rural areas, task force members cautioned that it can be a problem in urban and semi-urban

communities, many of which are changing, and often have inadequate or no public transportation. This problem becomes compounded by Head Start vehicles that are very expensive to maintain and operate, not to mention the lack of such vehicles in some programs. The task force expressed concern also about very rural, isolated families whose accessibility to Head Start program services is quite limited. Solutions to these problems need to be identified, documented and shared with other Head Start programs facing the same predicaments.

RECOMMENDATION 12:

Assure that there is ongoing quality and quantity of training and technical assistance for local program staff, board members and policy groups.

Discussion

This recommendation recognizes the necessity for quality and quantity of training and technical assistance for local program staff, board members and policy groups in order for parent involvement to be successful. Without it, programs may be in jeopardy. The task force also recognizes that because of an accelerated staff turnover rate in many Head Start programs, effective training and technical assistance is crucial. Also, given the complexity of Head Start's comprehensive services approach, specialized training and technical assistance is often required. This recommendation comes at a time when the T/TA system for Head Start is being drastically altered while at the same time there are new grantees springing into existence, and long time grantees continue to need some training and technical assistance. Even veteran grantees do not remain constant. They are ever changing, for whatever reasons, often dictating the need for continued quality training and technical assistance. Each year new children, parents and families come into Head Start bringing with them serious needs and problems requiring immediate solutions. There is no question about the need for a quality training and technical assistance network if quality programming is to be maintained.

RECOMMENDATION 13:

Assure there is ongoing monitoring of local programs by the national and regional office staffs.

Discussion

Monitoring Head Start programs to determine compliance with performance standards, like training and technical assistance, have been the key

ingredients in the long time success of Head Start since 1965. Hands on monitoring responsibilities provide opportunities for Federal staff to see first-hand whether or not communities are carrying out the full intent of the program, and expending Federal funds in an effective and acceptable manner. Conversely, it affords grantees and delegate agencies opportunities to interface with representatives from the funding agency, which can serve to expedite any needed changes in program approaches that may be indicated. Without regular monitoring, those programs who may be struggling with the parent involvement component may be tempted to let it slide if they realize no one is checking them. Since parent involvement is perhaps the most complex component, and the most difficult to implement successfully, year in and year out, it should not surprise anyone to see such back sliding in some programs who have not been visited by a Federal office representative in four or five years. The task force's major concern is the possible erosion of parent involvement in some programs in the absence of routine periodic monitoring by the national and regional office staffs.

RECOMMENDATION 14:

Emphasize a need for services to teenage parents in Head Start.

Discussion

The task force, recognizing the increasing incidence of teenage pregnancies during the last number of years, realizes that more teenage parents of pre-school children are eligible for Head Start services today than at any other time in the past. For this reason the task force believes Head Start programs must reach out more aggressively to recruit and enroll children of teenage parents, and to offer specialized programming and services to this special population of young parents whose needs may differ from their slightly older peers. The task force fears that many of these eligible teenage parents may be falling between the cracks of community services, and because of their shyness, or feelings of isolation and despair, or because of a Head Start program's inadequacy to meet their needs, they may not choose to enroll their child, and thus miss out on an important opportunity to obtain needed services.

RECOMMENDATION 15:

Amend the PIR to reflect what activities and training parents are provided in local programs.

Discussion

By amending the Head Start Program Information Report to include questions asking the nature of activities and training provided to parents, the Head Start Bureau will add to its capacity to obtain profiles on local Head Start programs and their approaches to involving parents. The task force believes that Head Start programs take the PIR seriously, and see the PIR as a mechanism for obtaining information that ACYF, Head Start Bureau views as a priority.

RECOMMENDATION 16:

Instruct local programs to provide more incentives for, and recognition of parents.

Discussion

The task force views this strategy as very crucial to maintaining effective parent involvement in local programs. Those Head Start programs that have been creative and innovative in providing incentives to get parents involved, and then recognize parents for their contributions to the program, tend to enjoy ongoing successful parent involvement. These strategies also can serve to increase parents' self-confidence and self-esteem.

RECOMMENDATION 17:

Instruct local programs to utilize parents' unique skills and talents in Head Start programs.

Discussion

The task force recognizes that when parents have an opportunity to display their unique skills and talents in the Head Start program, this is seen as a very positive experience for them.

Programs need to learn what talents and skills parents have, so that they can encourage parents to use them. It is another strategy for increasing parents' comfort levels, as well as their self-esteem and feelings of pride. Because different parents have different talents and skills, it is incumbent on the program to learn about them early in the program year so as to provide the necessary opportunities for parents to use them.

RECOMMENDATION 18:

Encourage local programs to involve and utilize former Head Start parents in various program activities.

Discussion

The task force feels that the involvement and utilization of former parents in the program can serve as an important motivator for new parents, while at the same time it can serve to meet some needs of former parents who may wish to contribute their time and be involved in a worthwhile endeavor such as Head Start. Depending on their talents, skills and interests, former parents can become involved in a wide variety of Head Start activities suited to their skills and talents, and thoroughly enjoy the experience. In order for this to happen, programs need to reach out to these former parents to make them feel comfortable, and provide options for their involvement in the program. The most important aspect of former parents being involved in the program is the positive modeling they provide for their peers who are new to the program. Former parents have a wealth of knowledge about the program, and can assist and positively influence their less experienced counterparts in all phases of the program.

RECOMMENDATION 19:

Require local programs to conduct annual parent training needs assessments.

Discussion

If parents are to enjoy a successful volunteer experience in Head Start, they will need to receive adequate training and support to carry out whatever tasks they will be performing in the program. Additionally, parents may express the need to receive training in a variety of situations that will benefit them outside the program as well. The needs assessment would take into account whatever training parents would need to volunteer their time and services in the classroom or in the nutrition program for instance, while on the other hand, they may express the need for parenting education or the need to enroll in a GED program to complete their high school education. These kinds of training opportunities need to be planned, based on identifying parents' interests in and needs for such training. The task force emphasized the importance of this recommendation because of their awareness that such training needs assessments do not routinely occur in many Head Start programs.

RECOMMENDATION 20:

Require local programs to routinely post job openings where parents can see them, and inform parents of job availabilities within Head Start or in the broader community.

Discussion

The task force noted that if parents are to apply for available jobs in Head Start or in the community, they need to be aware of such openings, and someone on the staff should be available to answer any questions that parents may have about the announcements. These job announcements should be routinely posted where parents have access to them. The concern of the task force is that this practice may not be taking place in many programs. In Head Start it has always been understood that parents who qualify should be given priority consideration for filling job vacancies in the program. Head Start needs to take a step further to make parents aware of other jobs in the community, and encourage them to apply.

RECOMMENDATION 21:

Require Head Start programs to conduct pre-service training, training conferences, seminars and workshops early in the program year to benefit new parents and staff.

DISCUSSION

The task force members expressed concern about the number of training workshops and conferences that are scheduled late in a program year for parents and staff, and believe that this can be self-defeating. Most training needs to take place at the beginning of a program year to get parents and staff ready to carry out their roles and responsibilities for the year, rather than at the end of the year, such as in April, May, June. The feeling is that many parents will not return for a second year in the program, so that training will not benefit the program being conducted that late in the year. This has become enough of a problem as to prompt the National Head Start Parents' Association to schedule an annual national training conference in November for parents serving on policy groups so that they will have the benefit of this knowledge for the remainder of the Head Start program year. This annual training conference has proven successful and been well received during the past three years. The task force is aware that most Head Start programs conduct pre-service training for staff each year prior to the opening of centers, but they question the value of training conferences for parents or staff during the spring months, when it is known that most programs are closed during the summer months.

Recommendations (4) for Maximizing Parent Participation in Decision-making

Recommendations (4) for Maximizing Parent Participation in Decision-making

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Amend and clarify the parent involvement performance standards by correcting outdated acronyms and information, and changing the terms of membership on policy groups to reflect "terms of membership on policy groups shall be limited to no more than three (3) *consecutive* years."

Discussion

Much of the confusion and misinterpretation of the parent involvement performance standards can be traced to the Appendix B.70.2, The Parents, which contains a number of outdated acronyms and some ambiguities. This does lead to regulations being misinterpreted by many sources across the country. To correct this problem the task force is recommending updating the text of this section, and adding the word "consecutive" to the statement limiting membership on policy groups to three years. In this way, members on policy groups could serve for three years on policy groups, then come off for one year, and be eligible to return, if so voted, for three additional years. The interpretation of the 3 year limitation at present, as provided by DHHS Legal Counsel is that terms of membership must be limited to a total of three years in a particular grantee or delegate agency policy group. The task force considers this to be limiting and underminding of successful ongoing parent involvement in local programs, and serves to exclude numbers of well intentioned, well informed and supportive parents and community representatives from serving on policy groups after they have completed three years of membership.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Require grantees' parent involvement work plans in their grant applications to clearly identify how parents are to be included in decision-making.

Discussion

Many grantee parent involvement work plans do not include sufficient specificity to describe how their Head Start programs will go about involving parents in the decision-making area. Too frequently the work plans tend to rephrase or regurgitate the text of the parent involvement performance standards, but fail to clearly describe *how* the program will involve parents in this crucial program area. The task force is recommending that ACYF, Head Start Bureau require grantees to spell out *how* they intend to satisfy this performance standard in their grant application's parent involvement work plan.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Require grantees to submit a detailed administrative plan describing how the Grantee Executive Director and Board would carry out their responsibilities to assure that parent involvement does take place in their programs.

Sub Recommendation 3:

- Train Grantee and Delegate Agency Boards about Head Start regulations including 70.2.
- Develop a manual or handbook for Board members describing grantee responsibilities with policy groups.
- Develop a training video-tape to convey the philosophy and intent of the team-partnership concept in decision-making.

Discussion

The task force discussed the problem of Grantee Boards of Directors having little or no contact with policy groups, often leading to impasses or stalemates regarding serious problems that occasionally occur requiring both decision-making parties to agree on a decision before any action can be taken. When these two bodies work together amicably, such impasses seldom if ever occur, but there is an awareness that some grantee boards never communicate with, or even know members of policy groups on a year to year basis. In order to avoid these unfortunate circumstances, the task force is recommending that grantee boards and policy groups receive training simultaneously on Head Start regulations so that they can become more knowledgeable about the program, and become more informed to render meaningful, fair decisions about the program. To assist in this process the task force recommends the development of a manual or handbook for board and policy group members, as well as a training video-tape that spells out the roles and responsibilities of each of the two governing bodies.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Develop a national office policy requiring all Head Start grantees to include in their refunding applications a *Procedure For Resolving Disputes* between grantee or delegate agency boards of Directors and policy councils or policy committees (Impasse Procedure).

Discussion

For a number of years the national office has attempted to promulgate a national Impasse Policy as an addendum to the parent involvement performance standards, but has not met with any success. The purpose of such a policy or procedure is to provide local grantees and delegate agencies with a mechanism to resolve impasses or disputes between boards and policy groups which occur when the two governing bodies cannot agree on such matters as hiring or firing Head Start Directors and staff, and on such matters as changing the major program work account and budget. Experience has revealed that without such a procedure in place, programs often struggle and suffer the consequences from a sometimes bitter impasse. If every Head Start program had such a procedure to follow (usually a binding arbitration procedure) whenever they were confronted with any serious disagreements, these impasses could be readily resolved, thus avoiding unpleasant confrontations and possible disruptions to the Head Start program.

Recommendations (2) For Increasing Parent Participation in Head Start Classrooms and Other Program Activities

Recommendations (2) For Increasing Parent Participation in Head Start Classrooms and Other Program Activities

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Require grantees to provide systematic training of parents for the various volunteer roles they undertake in Head Start programs.

Discussion

As discussed earlier under another recommendation, in order for parents' volunteering experiences in the program to be successful and meaningful, grantees need to provide the necessary systematic training and direction for parents. There are numerous ways parents may contribute their time and services to a Head Start program, e.g., following up children's and parents' absences; encouraging other parents to participate; serving as home companions during other parents' family crises; helping to conduct open house activities at centers; typing; answering phones; operating computers are a few, but each of these activities would require some type of training or supervision in order for a parent to clearly understand how they are to carry out a given task.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Require local programs to develop a guide for parents who volunteer and observe in the classroom.

Discussion

When parents volunteer or observe in Head Start classrooms, this should be a learning experience for them, and to make it so, in keeping with the previous recommendation, parents should be provided with a guide for how to volunteer and observe in the classroom. The guide should serve as

the focus of training for parents, and they should be allowed to keep the guide permanently. Each day that parents volunteer in classrooms, the teacher in charge should provide direction for them so that they clearly understand how they will be spending their time while in the classroom. This should prevent parents from just sitting or standing by aimlessly with no particular role to play. The task force expressed concern about the latter circumstance, and how it could eventually dampen parents' enthusiasm or curiosity for volunteering in this aspect of the program.

Recommendations (4) For Increasing Parents' Opportunities to Participate in Activities Which They Initiate and Help to Develop

Recommendations (4) For Increasing Parents' Opportunities to Participate in Activities Which They Initiate and Help to Develop

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Require all Head Start programs to maintain adequate parent activity funds consistent with DHHS policies, without unnecessary restrictions being imposed on their use.

Discussion

This recommendation is a repeat of Recommendation 8 in the first section of this report, but is most crucial for successfully carrying out this area of parent participation in Head Start. See additional discussion under Recommendation 8.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Reinforce the requirement that local programs provide a designated area in or outside center buildings for parent activities, as specified in the performance standards.

Discussion

Task force members expressed concern about the number of grantees and delegate agencies who do not provide a designated area for parent activities inside or outside of their center buildings. If parents are to feel comfortable coming into Head Start centers, there should be an area (a room) set aside for their activities which might include group discussions, rap sessions, lounging, coffee clatches, sewing, TV or video viewing, handicrafts, reading, etc.

With such a designated area, parents have a multitude of possible activities which they could initiate and develop, and at the same time they

can be close to their children. Such parent activity rooms play a crucial role in drawing some parents into the program. It provides them an opportunity to interact with their peers, to interact with staff, and an opportunity to relieve possible feelings of isolation and detachment at home.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Require local programs to provide relevant parent education curricula experiences for parent groups, based on parents' expressed interests and needs.

Discussion

The task force expressed support for the two parent education curriculums developed by the Head Start Bureau, namely *Exploring Parenting* and *Looking At Life*, as well as the series of booklets on Exploring Self-Sufficiency which was never officially printed and disseminated nationally. These publications and other useful parent education approaches are seen by the task force as vital in meeting different parents' needs, and should be emphasized even more by the national and regional offices. The concern by the task force is that some programs do not routinely offer such parent education opportunities, for whatever reasons, and that this is depriving parents of much needed helpful information.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Assure that lists of current or former Head Start Parents who are qualified speakers, trainers and consultants, are developed and circulated at the State and regional levels.

Discussion

The task force is aware of numbers of current or former Head Start parents who have unique skills in speaking, training and serving as consultants. So that these parents may be identified and called upon for their services, a list of their names, addresses and phone numbers would be useful to circulate at the State and regional levels. Such parents could serve as speakers and trainers at State or regional training workshops, and could possibly broaden their activities to include performing in other child care settings. These lists of names could have implications for parents pursuing certain careers, and being remunerated for their services. This kind of activity could also lead to economic self-sufficiency. Many ex-Head Start parents have reached plateaus of success by getting exposed to such experiences through Head Start. The task force would like to see Head Start continue to nurture and support this concept.

Recommendations (2) For Increasing Opportunities For Parents To Work With Their Children In Cooperation With Staff

Recommendations (2) For Increasing Opportunities For Parents To Work With Their Children In Cooperation With Staff

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Develop an initiative to increase parents' awareness of the impact of drug/substance abuse on children and their families by creating a task force to study the problem.

Discussion

The incidence of drug/substance abuse has proliferated to the point that very young children have become victims of such abuse. In addition, many parents themselves have fallen victim to this usage, which can affect their participation in Head Start programs. The task force recognizes this problem as a most serious threat to family stability and cohesion, and is a more widespread problem than most people realize. Very young children are reportedly becoming addicted to drugs, not to mention the growing incidence of drug addicted babies whose mothers were taking drugs at the time they were pregnant. These and other unfortunate circumstances warrant some kind of emphasis on prevention, and the task force sees a need to increase parents' awareness of the impact and effect of drug/substance abuse on their children and their families. The creation of a task force to study these problems is highly recommended. Parents need to know how to approach this problem with their children, and some parents themselves need assistance in dealing with an addiction problem that affects them.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Develop an initiative to increase parents' awareness of missing children, abused children, sexual molestation of children, and how parents can help prevent such occurrences from happening.

Discussion

Like Recommendation 1 above, this recommendation recognizes the need to increase parents' awareness of problems that could affect their children which are seldom discussed, or about which very little is known. Like chemical dependency, the incidence of missing children, abused and sexually molested children is increasing in this country. As a result of these most damaging incidences, parents need to become more aware of how widespread this problem is, and how they can help prevent such occurrences from happening. Some of the prevention is based on parents taking necessary precautions with their children, by talking with them, and encouraging certain habits and behavior which can serve as deterrents against such abuse. However, for this to be done effectively, parents themselves need to benefit from such awareness training, and Head Start programs should be providing this training for parents on a routine basis. It is conceivable that one task force could address the problems cited in Recommendations 1 and 2.

Recommendations (5) For Strengthening Parent Participation in the Transition of Their Children From Head Start to Elementary School

Recommendations (5) For Strengthening Parent Participation in the Transition of Their Children From Head Start to Elementary School

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Assume leadership at the national and State levels to effect interagency cooperation between Head Start and the school systems in order to assure for parent involvement in the transition of Head Start children to the schools.

Discussion

The task force recommends that ACYF assume the leadership role in bringing about a dialogue with the Education Department and the State Departments of Education in facilitating the involvement of parents in their children's transition from Head Start to the elementary schools. Inherent in this recommendation is a need for school systems to provide opportunities for parents to become involved in meaningful ways in their systems so as to assure the smooth transition of Head Start children to the schools. School systems have not traditionally supported or condoned the extent of parent involvement as carried out in Head Start programs. The task force would like to see ACYF, Head Start Bureau impact the school systems in a way that would allow for meaningful parent involvement in the schools, particularly at the time for transition.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Require Head Start programs to increase communication and coordination with local school systems to support the orderly transition of Head Start children to the schools.

Discussion

This recommendation is a partner to Recommendation 2 above, and calls for local program strategies to effect successful transition of Head Start children to the schools. The task force expressed concern about some Head Start programs who may not be doing this routinely, and as a result, many parents may not be aware of their rights or opportunities in the schools, or assume a withdrawn attitude toward assisting their children in what could be a semi-traumatic period in their children's lives at this time of transition. The recommendation is to reawaken Head Start programs and the role they should be playing in preparing children and parents for this transition.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Encourage local programs to include representation from PTAs and elementary schools on Head Start policy groups.

Discussion

In order to encourage two-way communication and coordination between the schools and Head Start, the task force is recommending that Head Start programs include representation from PTAs (parents) and elementary school (staff and administrators) on Head Start policy groups. In this way, Head Start parents can be exposed to PTA parents and school staff, who in turn can learn necessary information about Head Start programs as both systems coordinate their efforts to effect a smooth transition for Head Start children and parents.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Require local programs to develop audio-visual materials to assist parents with their children's transition from Head Start to the schools.

Discussion

This recommendation supports the two previous recommendations, and suggests one strategy to assist parents with their children's transition. The task force feels strongly that preparing parents and children for transition is a process that warrants planned sequential supportive activities for both parents and children, and must be treated as such.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Consider demonstrating the involvement of parents one year prior to entering Head Start, and continuing one year after.

Discussion

This recommendation by the task force was prompted by discussion about how one year in Head Start often is not adequate to bring about meaningful parent involvement, and that by involving parents one year prior to their children's enrollment, and one year after their children leave Head Start, would in effect be exposing parents to three years of Head Start services. This certainly would have implications for preparing parents the year before for the roles they could assume during the one year their child is in Head Start (4 year olds), and would have implications for the transition year after the child leaves Head Start. What the task force is recommending is that ACYF, Head Start Bureau fund a number of Head Start grantees to demonstrate the usefulness of this program approach, and whether or not it is appealing to parents.

Conclusion

Conclusion

During the months that the task force members deliberated on the subject of parent involvement and how to increase parent participation in all aspects of the Head Start program, we were continually reminded of the numerous success stories about parents and their achievements since the program began in 1965. These positive outcomes for parents served to guide our discussions along constructive lines, and spelled hope for our completing a set of recommendations that would further the success of parent involvement and further strengthen the national Head Start program.

As we listened to disturbing accounts of the many deterrents to parent involvement in local programs, we also heard first hand accounts of creative and innovative approaches to effecting successful parent involvement. Though the problems confronting parent involvement are difficult, painful and complex, much good continues to be done in Head Start. What this task force had to struggle with was identifying how to bring about consistency across all Head Start programs in implementing meaningful parent involvement on a regular basis, and how to transfer good practice information to those grantees who could use it.

Perhaps the most challenging and difficult issue to discuss and analyze was the one focusing on local program staff who have negative or less than supportive attitudes toward parents. Where these circumstances exist, it can almost be determined immediately that parent involvement will be lacking in such programs. Many parents are very sensitive, and if for any reason they feel their presence in the program is not genuinely wanted, they will not participate. Part of this problem is that some staff are unaware that their attitudes are perceived as being negative, insensitive, unfriendly or detached.

For this reason the task force emphasized the need for training of staff, administrators, board members and policy group community representatives to be sure that this problem is approached appropriately and to avoid offending parents.

The task force found that there is an avalanche of sound approaches to involving parents in Head Start, and that many of these approaches and strategies have evolved over the twenty-two years of Head Start programming. We have found that many of these approaches work in some programs, while some do not work in others. The keys to success in having meaningful parent involvement include having a sensitive, accepting staff and director who understand and respect the parents in their program, and who are willing to listen to parents express their interests and needs in a non-judgemental manner, and then develop a program of activities designed to accommodate those interests and needs. Staff must be

knowledgable about parent programming; they must be flexible, sensitive and at all times supportive and respectful of parents.

On the whole, the task force believes Head Start has done an exceptional job in this vital parent involvement component over the years, but in order to increase parent participation in Head Start programs nationally, the recommendations submitted by the task force must be taken seriously and given careful consideration and application. Head Start parents and their families face intense stresses, some of which are new. For this reason, Head Start staff must be creative, and prepared to assist these parents to find and apply new solutions to these stressful and nagging problems in order to relieve some of the pressures facing them. Head Start programs should be settings where parents can go to relieve some of those pressures, so that they can better be able to absorb valuable information related to their children's development, parenting, homemaking, skill development, personal development and self-enhancement.

Head Start parents are the vital link to their children's future, and represent the central nucleus of their family which is the basic unit of our society. Our nation obtains its strength, durability and productivity from strong, healthy families. Head Start's role in contributing to this reality can be heightened by assuring that all parents gain the maximum benefits from the program in their respective communities, and by assuring that the parent involvement program is an exemplary one. It is toward this goal that the National Parent Involvement Task Force has devoted its time and energies.

"I never knew before I came here that mothering is a skill. My mother didn't feel proud of being a mother - but I feel proud to try to improve my skills and I think I'm doing it."

. . . . . a Head Start parent

Appendices

Appendices

Parent Involvement Task Force Members

William Acosta Regional Administrator, OHDS Dallas, Texas	Regional Office Representative
Maria Alvarado Assistant Director Idaho Migrant Council Caldwell, Idaho	Migrant Head Start Directors' Representative
Eugenia Boggus Pre-School Development Program, Inc. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	National Head Start Parents' Association Representative
Claude Endfield Assistant Director Western Navajo Agency Tuba City, Arizona	Indian Head Start Directors' Association Representative
Bernice Evans Resource Center Texas Southern University Houston, Texas	National Head Start Friends' Association Representative
Arthur Giron St. Landry Parish Head Start Opelousas, Louisiana	National Head Start Parents' Association Representative
Sarah Greene, Director Manatee Opportunity Council Bradenton, Florida	Past President National Head Start Association Representative
Evelyn Jackson California Human Resources, Inc. San Francisco, California	Vice President National Head Start Parents' Association Representative
Judith Kuster Minnesota Valley Action Council Mankato, Minnesota	National Head Start Parents' Association Representative
Willie Simmons Bolivar County Community Action Cleveland, Mississippi	President, National Head Start Parents' Association Representative

Joyce Spicer Consolidated Head Start Program Washington, D.C.	Past President National Head Start Parents' Association Representative
Larry Siroshton, Director Head Start of Clark County Vancouver, Washington	President National Head Start Director's Association Representative
Patricia Thomas Board of Education Head Start Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	National Head Start Staff Association Representative
Richard H. Johnson, Chief Social Services/Parent Involvement Branch, Program Support Division Head Start Bureau, ACYF Washington, D.C.	Chairman of Task Force

Parent Task Force Committee
Questionnaire—Head Start Parent Involvement

Please fill out as honestly as possible and turn in at the registration area at any time prior to Friday, April ___, 1986. You do not have to sign your name.

1. Are you a new parent with Head Start or is this your first experience with Head Start?_____
2. How long have you had children in Head Start_____
3. What types of training have you had?_____
4. What types of training would you like to have?_____
5. Are you presently serving on _____center committee or both?_____
6. Do you know what 70.2 is? Explain briefly_____
   _____
7. Do you volunteer in the program? Yes ____No ____If yes, how often? Weekly _____ monthly _____ daily _____ once a week_____ once a month _____ other _____

8. In what capacity do you volunteer? (Classroom, office, etc.) Were you offered other choices?

9. If you volunteer, list reasons why you volunteer:

_____

_____

_____

10. If you do not volunteer, list reasons why you do not volunteer_____

_____

11. Do you understand what your position should be in the Head Start program?

12. Are expectations for HS parents too great? Do you understand the expectations?

13. If you were *required* to volunteer for a certain number of hours each month to keep your child in the program, would you?

14. Are you involved in special projects in Head Start or in your community such as parent training, etc.?

15. If transportation and child care services were provided at the center, would you volunteer more?

16. Do you feel comfortable volunteering in the Head Start program?_____ If not, why? Lack of knowledge? Shyness? Takes time when you would rather be doing something else? Attitudes?_____

_____

17. What suggestions do you have to increase/improve PI in Head Start.